



The Souls of White Folk: White settlers in Kenya, 1900s-20s (Studies in Imperialism MUP)

Brett L. Shadle

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Kenya's white settlers have long captivated observers. They are alternately celebrated and condemned, painted as romantic pioneers, hedonistic bed-hoppers or crude racists. However, if we wish to better understand Kenya's tortured history, we must examine settlers not as caricatures, but as people inhabiting a unique historical moment.

The souls of white folk offers a striking new interpretation of white settlement in early colonial Kenya by interrogating settlers' lives. It takes seriously - though not uncritically - what settlers said, how they viewed themselves and their world. It argues that the settler soul was composed of a series of interlaced ideas: settlers equated civilisation with a (hard to define) whiteness; they were emotionally enriched through claims to paternalism and trusteeship over Africans; they felt themselves constantly threatened by Africans, by the state, and by the moral failures of other settlers; and they daily enacted their claims to supremacy through rituals of prestige, deference, humiliation and violence.

This book shows how settlers could proclaim real affection for their African servants, and tend to them with intimate medical procedures, as well as whip, punch and kick them - for these acts were central to the joy of settlement, and the preservation of settlement. It also explains why settlers could be equally alarmed by an African man with a fine hat, Russian Jews or a black policeman, as by white drunkards, adulterers and judges - all posed dangers to white prestige.

The souls of white folk will appeal to anyone interested in the histories of Africa, colonialism and race, and can be appreciated by scholars and students alike.

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